

Calorie Count Law Gets Four Stars – editorial

You can, assuming your affairs are in order, go into a Chili's restaurant and order the Big Mouth Bites, a meal consisting of four bacon cheeseburgers, fries, onion strings, etc. According to the Center for Science in the Public Interest, a Washington-based nonprofit (www.cspinet.org), this gustatory marathon will set you back 2,350 calories, 38 grams of saturated fat and 3,940 mg of sodium.

Or you might consider the Fried Mac and Cheese at Cheesecake Factory, which weighs in at 1,570 calories, 69 grams of fat and 1,860 mg of sodium. (An entire stick of butter offers 57 grams of fat and 800 calories.)

Other chain restaurants have similar caloric cluster bombs, and we suspect many people aren't aware of it. The General Assembly has done them a favor by requiring that chain restaurants publish on menus and menu boards the number of calories for each of their standard menu items, starting next year. The governor ought to sign the bill.

There are those who will say that the legislature shouldn't be the state's nutritionist, or that lawmakers should have spent more time on the budget, or that the law is somehow unfair to the restaurants.

Well, they should have finished the budget by now. But the other claims are trumped by a valid concern for the health of state residents. Two-thirds of adults and one-third of children and adolescents in this country are obese or overweight. Obesity, linked to heart disease, cancer, diabetes and other ailments, is second only to smoking as a cause of preventable death, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Menu labeling, which is gaining traction across the country, will help us find our way out of fat city. It is not much different from the labeling requirement for packaged foods, enacted in 1994. Simply publishing the information is not, as some have charged, food policing. If anything, Connecticut's law should also require listings of fat and sodium.

However, this flaw may be corrected by federal legislation recently introduced by U.S. Rep. Rosa DeLauro. The Menu Education and Labeling Act would require fast-food and other chain restaurants to post calories, saturated and trans fats, carbohydrates and sodium on printed menus.

Why not? Our only suggestion would be to add the fact that an average adult should consume about 2,000 calories, 20 grams of saturated fat and 1,500 mg of sodium a day.